

AS I SEE IT

We should seek new ways of making power

By KEVIN GUNN

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Missouri is heavily dependent on coal to generate its electricity, which has contributed to some of the lowest electricity rates in the country. However, with potential carbon restrictions coming from Washington, D.C., as well as the renewable standards that were passed by voters last fall, Missouri needs to examine alternatives. Consider the following:

1. If consumers of all the major municipal and investor-owned utilities replaced conventional light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs, Missouri could save more than 66 million kilowatt hours annually, drastically reducing load factors on current generation facilities.
2. According to the American Council on Renewable Energy, Missouri has the potential of generating about 6.9 trillion BTU from landfill gas in the state. This fuel, called biomass, captures the generated methane from landfills and delivers a cleaner fuel to generate electricity. By comparison, Missouri produces about 4.2 trillion BTU of coal. Other sources of biomass in Missouri are switch grass, timber harvest residue and crop residue.
3. Missouri currently has legislation and rules in place that allow residential and commercially generated power, most likely from solar panels used to generate localized electricity for one's own home or business.
4. There are current projects like the one championed by Democratic U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan to place small turbines in locks and dams to harness power generated by the Mississippi River.
5. Missouri has rich wind potential in its northwest corner. Some reports say that Missouri has about 5,960 megawatts of potential wind capacity.

With all of these taken together, it isn't hard to imagine a Missouri where consumers use energy-efficient techniques to save electricity, where solar panels on the top of every residential and commercial building generate energy that can flow back to the grid, where small turbines generate electricity from Missouri's rivers, landfills generate electricity from waste methane, and wind farms rise on the Missouri plains.

All of these generating options combined with large scale nuclear, natural gas and coal generation can push Missouri to the forefront of electricity generation. The idea of smaller, decentralized, clean energy generation is an idea whose time has come, not only for environmental reasons but for economic development reasons as well. Most of the technologies mentioned have the added benefit of creating good local jobs that cannot be exported and can exist even in the most rural parts of Missouri. While the current debate on nuclear power must be a part of any discussion on electricity generation, Missourians must take an even longer view and look to new ways of generating clean, reliable power.

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